

DEAD MAGIC™

SECRETS AND SURVIVORS



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PROLOGUE: THE IDES OF FEBRUUS



How long? How long had it been, the high priest wondered, since he had first been imprisoned? A long time had passed, Larth was sure of that. Thousands of generations of spider, beetle and worm had played out their sad little lives in front of him, illuminated by the glowing nimbus that surrounded the ancient Etruscan. And the murals of his tomb, whose colors had once been so vivid, had faded to muted hues where they had not worn away entirely. Larth had watched it all. A mortal mage would have been left insensate by the magic that bound the high priest, but Larth had ceased to be mortal long before he had been entombed.

Still, the swirling nimbus of light that surrounded Larth and wove time and space into a net to trap him had long ago begun to fail. Where it had once glowed so bright as to illuminate his entire tomb, the light now barely illuminated the figures of the fishermen in the mural opposite him. Another century, Larth imagined, perhaps two, and he would be free. Almost no time at all for one such as he. Then, at last, he would learn what had transpired in Tarchna since his imprisonment.

Because his tomb had remained sealed since the night the triumvirate of magi from Rome's Cult of Mercury had ambushed him, Larth had long ago prepared himself for the worst. If upstart Rome had not conquered his beloved Tarchna, surely the priests who

knew of his home among the city's dead would have come to free him from this awful prison. But they had not come, nor had his fellow *lucomones* from the other city-states, though their powers of divination must have told them of his plight. No, the only possibility that made any sense was that the Romans had wanted Larth eliminated before launching an attack against Tarchna and had sent their lackeys in the Cult of Mercury to ensure this was done. That Tarchna's priests had never come to his tomb afterward meant the attack must have succeeded. That the *lucomones* had never come meant that Tarchna was only the first of the surviving Etruscan states to be attacked. Even without his long-lost powers of divination, it had always been clear that not just Tarchna, but Etruria itself had been subdued by the upstart republic. How long ago had it been? How long since his people, his nation, all he'd ever cared for had fallen to dust?

Suddenly, sounds interrupted Larth's reverie. Sounds like something was scraping on the masonry of his tomb. Then light, dazzling light. It had been so long since Larth had seen any light besides that radiating from his prison. Could the light he had thought still so bright have really been so dim? The high priest's ancient eyes struggled to adjust to this new light's brilliance. As they did, Larth could just make out the form of a woman stepping in front to face him — at least, the priest thought it to be a woman. The strange garb she wore made it difficult to discern gender in the blinding light now flooding Larth's tomb.

In a strange language, the... woman... yes, Larth was sure his rescuer was a woman now... she addressed someone off to his right. The priest saw no one there. Then, he concentrated, his eyes piercing the veil between worlds. Aha, a shade, also strangely garbed. So this was to whom the woman spoke. If it still beat, Larth's heart would have leapt into his throat. This woman was a speaker for the dead, as he had been. Could it be that Etruria still stood? That the priesthood still existed and had finally come to free him? Then, the woman addressed Larth, and his dead blood grew colder still.

At first, she addressed Larth in the same language she had spoken to the shade in, but when she saw Larth's brow furrow at its incomprehensibility, she spoke again in a tongue Larth was quite familiar with, one he'd heard over and over again during his imprisonment as he replayed the details of his ambush and capture in his mind. Latin. The woman spoke Latin. Could it be that the scions of Romulus still ruled above in Tarchna after so very long? Reflexively, Larth attempted to raise his

right hand to stop the hated words from coming — and it moved.

Larth had thought that the glow from the chains of time and space that imprisoned him had merely faded in intensity in comparison to the flood of outside light that now illuminated his tomb, but there was more to it than that. The woman entering the tomb had brought something with her, something that had worn away at the magics that bound Larth. The net woven round the high priest was fragile now, little more than a shimmering cobweb.

"...oh, ancient scion of Caine," the woman continued, "reveal to your descendents' lowly servant how she might free your incorruptible flesh from this tomb that has held you for so very long."

Inconceivable. Not only was this woman prattling on in the hated tongue of Rome; now she'd mistaken him for one of the undead tomb skulkers that infested lesser lands' necropoli and fed off their citizens. Had the Romans conquered Etruria and then, in their ignorance, allowed the grave demons — demons the *lucomones* had banished to the simpler lands surrounding Etruria — to overrun the sacrosanct tombs of Larth's forefathers? Larth had to know.

Larth flexed the divine spark that burned within him, and the magic binding him for untold centuries was sloughed off like so much dead weight. He took a step forward and smiled wickedly at the woman who had so stupidly dared to invade his home and prison spouting Latin and mistaking him from the accursed of the Hebrew god. Too late, the woman seemed to realize that something had gone terribly awry with her and her master's plan, whatever it might have been.

"Please," she pleaded, still speaking in the hated tongue, "I'm here to help you."

"Oh, do not concern yourself over that," Larth spat, also in Latin, "you shall indeed help me."

Like the worms that forever managed to wriggle their way inside of Larth's tomb, the high priest's mind slipped into the mind of the undead's thrall. The creature screamed and then began babbling in her annoying nonsense tongue. No matter, the priest didn't need to understand her language to learn what he needed to know. Images flooded his mind. Of undead creatures seeking one of their own elders entombed in... Tarquinia.... Of how one of these entities intended to devour the ancient's blood and very soul and of the lore of death they all hoped to plunder from both tomb and soul. Incensed, Larth pushed deeper into her mind to learn of Tarchna and Rome. And he learned what little she knew, but enough to confirm his worst fears. Etruria

was long dead. Rome too, though not before the upstarts built an empire greater than Alexander's and held it for more than a thousand years.

Rage welled up inside Larth. He'd been entombed for more than two thousand years. His nation and all its people had been wiped from the pages of history, with little more than a smattering of examples of its art and literature having survived to the present. The final irony was that what little was known was passed on by Etruria's conqueror, Rome.

It was just too much to bear. Larth's mind withdrew from the woman, whom he now knew to be called Lucrezia della Passaglia. She dropped hard to the floor of the tomb. This apparently alerted the shade, whom Larth now knew was called Anton, to the fact that something had to be done to save his mistress, so he stupidly moved to interpose himself between the high priest and the woman.

Larth was not amused.

Larth reached within his robes and drew forth a simple silver key, pointing it past the blustering shade at a mural of a set of double doors flanked by two men garbed much like Larth himself. "Mighty Vanth," the priest began speaking in a language dead for two millennia, "grant me, your humble priest, egress to thy realm."

A seam appeared between and around the two painted doors, and then, quite suddenly, they swung back to reveal a twisting hallway of black basalt, wherein dark noisome things skittered and chattered. Catching sight of this, Anton's face contorted into a mask of absolute terror.

"Greetings, servants of Charun, Lord of the Dead," Larth spoke in his dead tongue, unmoved by Anton's plight. "I bid thee welcome to the lands of the quick and offer you these tender morsels as sacrifice. Do my will, and I promise you many, many more."

At this, a horrible buzzing erupted from the creatures' ranks, a buzzing not so much heard as felt. As Larth concentrated, the buzzing resolved itself into a chorus of voices, speaking as one. "What have you to offer, priest, that we may not just take?"

"I offer you freedom to indulge your darkest desires, oh Charontes. I offer you slaughter on a scale not seen in eons. I offer you the bodies and souls of all those usurpers who dwell in the city above. I would see them all butchered, their city razed and lost Tarchna resurrected atop the bones of their 'Tarquinia'."

"No, Great Nesna Nethshrac, do not do this thing," a voice called out in the mother tongue.

Larth whirled to see that two more oddly dressed people had dared to intrude upon his tomb, each bearing

a strange metal torch from which an amber glow radiated. "Who are you, that you speak the language of my people and would dare to stay my hand from its righteous vengeance?"

"My name is Massimo Pallottino, and the members of my family are the last survivors of the Etruscan priesthood."

"Absurd," spoke Larth. "If that were true, you would certainly join me in my quest to punish the usurpers and bring back the glory of Etruria."

"Great Priest, those who brought ruin to your kingdom are long dead, their empire dust. The people in the city above are innocent of the crimes you would punish them for. My initiate and I sought to free you from your prison at long last and would have done so had not this woman, a servant of this land's vampiric nigromancers, not interfered."

"It matters not who freed me or their motivations for doing so. I was wrongfully imprisoned for more than two millennia while the people above picked clean the bones of my—our—civilization. They will be made to pay. The only question is whether you and the novice will stand with me or against me. What say you?"

"If you can not be dissuaded from your course of genocide, then we must stand against you."

"So be it. What say you, Charontes?"

From behind the portal, a veritable wave of the chattering, inhuman creatures rose up and then leapt through the door. Anton and Lucrezia vanished under their monstrous, dark-blue forms. "Your terms are agreeable to us, Nesna Nethshrac," they buzzed excitedly.

Massimo began to speak the ancient charms of binding the beasts of the Underworld, but was struck by a flurry of the Charontes before he could bring his magic to bear against them.

"Hold them fast, but do not kill these two... yet," instructed Larth.

A pair of Charontes held Massimo fast, and one narrowly grabbed hold of the mage's apprentice's right arm. Many others flooded outside like an ill wind, the violence of their exit extinguishing the lights that had illuminated the tomb's interior, and plunging the mausoleum into darkness.

At his wits' end, the apprentice mage hurled a minor spirit-wracking rote at the Charontes holding fast to his arm. Enraged, the creature wrenched the young man's arm back hard, bending it the wrong way at the elbow, and backhanded him across the face, its wicked claws drawing deep gashes across his eyes. The apprentice landed near the open door of the tomb,

scrambled awkwardly to his feet and ran staggering out the tomb's open door.

"Think about what you're doing, Nesna Nethshrac," Massimmo pleaded. "Our kind is charged with protecting the living from the Restless Dead that would harm them. We pledged our lives to that cause."

Larth turned to face the 'priest' suspended before him, eyes narrowing in anger. "I'll have you know, I died 20 years before I was imprisoned by the Roman dogs, and on the day I became immortal, I pledged my eternal half-life to protecting the people of Tarchna. In that I may have failed, to my eternal shame, but I will see to it that they are avenged, so help me gods. And no Roman sympathizer like you is going to stop me."

"Roman sympathizer? Listen to yourself, Great Priest. Think. I am no sympathizer—there are no sympathizers. What's more, there are no Romans. The Roman Empire fell to barbarians hundreds of years ago."

"I will hear no more of this. Charontes, teach this 'priest' the value of silence."

At this, the two spirits tugged on the mage's arms. The right arm popped from its socket with a crack, and the man gritted his teeth hard, cold sweat pouring from his brow. There was a sharp gasp from the tomb's entrance.

Larth spun at this to find himself confronted with two more intruders on his sanctuary, a tall man with flaming red hair and a small, lean, raven-tressed woman.

"More foreigners. Charontes, here are two new sacrifices for you. Kill the trespassers."

Needing little encouragement, the two Charontes hurled themselves at the newcomers but were stopped dead a meter distant by some unseen barrier. As the spirits struck the unseen ward, a medallion in the woman's outstretched hand glowed a cold blue. Larth recognized the symbol on the medallion — the Seal of Solomon.

Larth whirled on the injured mage lying on the ground at his feet, his face contorted by rage. "The Cult of Mercury," the ancient priest screamed. "You claim to be a priest of Etruria and dare to ally yourself with the lapdogs of Rome."

"No," Massimmo protested, raising his good arm in a gesture of peace. "It's not like that. They aren't what you think. And I didn't know about—"

"Silence, false priest," shouted the Nesna Nethshrac, pointing his finger at Pallottino. "Enough of your lies. I, Larth Fulumchva, Lucomones and Nesna Nethshrac to the dodecopoli of Etruria, name thee false priest, blasphemer and traitor to the Etruscan people. In the name of all that was done to myself and our people, I give to



thee the Release of the Agonizing Death. May Vanth flay the flesh from your shade and Charun hammer your soul to jelly.”

At these words, Pallottino began to writhe screaming in agony on the floor of the tomb, only to explode into dust a moment later.

Throbbing with power, his divine spark now fanned to a blazing brand, Larth turned to deal with the intruders, when the fire blazing within himself began to burn him. Wherever this inner fire erupted from, he began to rot, the years he had denied to the grave for so long now taking their toll on his undying form.

Taking full advantage of Larth’s debility, the tall man raised a wand of gleaming orichalcum at the priest. Its end erupted with fire and an earsplitting crack like a thunderbolt, and Larth felt his torso explode, showering the rear of his tomb with blood and gore.

The pain was incredible, but Larth knew such an injury would not, could not, kill him. Still, he was terribly injured, and his own magic had burned him. He would not be imprisoned again. Now was the time to flee. Calling to mind the rote he’d used earlier, Larth again pointed his silver key at the door mural, intending to transport himself to a safe portion of the Underworld. Instead, the portal opened to reveal enormous roiling clouds of spirit jetsam, ridden by a hundred Charontes.

Suddenly the terrible burning erupted from inside him again as he lingered on the edge of the open spirit doorway; there was another sharp report from behind, then another, and a sudden loss of balance as he fell through the portal. Falling end over end, he saw the portal far above him wink out of existence.

Larth’s broken body came to rest with a crash. Above the high priest, a whirling mass of Charontes faltered in their flight, only to dive down and land next to him. Larth struggled to make his broken, rotted form rise, but to no avail. As he lay there, waiting for the Charontes to fall upon and devour him, Larth heard their incessant buzzing grow to a fever pitch. And then, he heard a voice behind the buzzing, or over it, or within. It whispered to him reassuringly, promising surcease from his pain and sanctuary amongst her brood.

“The End is nigh,” the kindly voice whispered. “The time of Epopeteia comes, when your kind will be undone. But you will survive this time of trouble, as you have survived so very much. And I will help you to grow strong again, that you might serve me.”

And as she spoke, Larth saw in his mind’s eye the future unfold before him as it had so many centuries ago. And what he saw was both wonderful and terrible beyond imagining.

INTRODUCTION: THAT WHICH WAS LOST...



This second volume of the **Dead Magic** series is titled **Secrets and Survivors**. The magics explored herein are largely forgotten by the modern world—but they're not exactly dead. Someone, somewhere, still practices these old ways, and can be approached to teach them to a new generation. That doesn't mean it will be easy finding these rare, few mages, or that they'll want to be found, much less be willing to teach their ancient secrets to whomever has the temerity to track them down. These ways have been kept hidden for a reason, either because their practitioners despise the modern world and don't want to taint their old traditions by subjecting them to it, or because they hold dangerous power their wielders don't want to share—or that rivals don't want to see unearthed.

The Traditions can no longer rely on their own ways to escape the predicament they're in, with the

Avatar Storm raging across the Gauntlet between worlds, their Masters missing in action, and the Technocracy cementing its power. It's time to fan out across the world and rediscover what was lost, reconnect with the forgotten magical heritages of many cultures, and discover new methods of reaching for the unattainable: Ascension.

ROGUE COUNCIL TRAVELOGUES

Spurring this new era of discovery is the enigmatic Rogue Council. The Sphinx sends messages to mages across the world with mysterious edicts and clues, urging them to explore the forgotten corners of the planet for lost magic that still inexplicably survives in the hands of unknown mages or elder spirits.

As with anything the Sphinx is involved in, controversy arises. Many wholeheartedly follow these messages,

but some distrust them and wonder what their real purpose is: To truly reawaken a lineage to the past, or to rouse entities best left undisturbed? Some mages so greatly fear this endeavor that they actively attempt to thwart it, going so far as to attack mages who pursue such research. Of course, the Technocracy also distrusts anything these Reality Deviants engage in, and it also moves to investigate these messages from the Sphinx — apparently, these messages aren't just delivered to the Traditions, spurring speculation about a mad purpose to turn both sides against one another in open warfare.

The truth behind all this furious activity is unknown, but even those who side with the Sphinx wonder: Are the End Times finally upon us? Is Ascension truly at hand? Or is this the last gasp of a dying worldview, the desperate writhing of magic as it finally dies, killed by the victory of the Technocratic paradigm?

For more information on the Rogue Council, see **Manifesto: Transmissions from the Rogue Council**.

FROM EAST TO WEST

Dead Magic 2: Secrets and Survivors explores old ways from around the world and from different eras. While the magics of the Australian aboriginal natives never really died out, the magic of ancient Etruria hasn't had a true practitioner since the fall of Rome. Mages seeking these secrets — no matter how alive or dead — should keep one admonishment in mind: **Tread carefully.**

Sad Islands in Strange Seas: Polynesia explores the South Seas islands and their magical traditions — largely ignored by modern Traditionalists and Technocrats alike. From Hawaii and Easter Island to Samoa and New Zealand, the ways of the *kahunas* are explored, including the fascinating powers of *tikis*, *tatus* and *mokomai* (head-hunting).

Wide Awake in the Dreamtime: Native Australia reveals the hidden landscape of the Dreamtime, empowering the spirit world of Australia. Only those who truly live on the land and are initiated by it can know the Dreaming — all others are blind to its gifts. But once you've tasted the Dreaming, you may not want to leave, for no other place will seem like home.

And the Beat Goes On: Shakti and Shiva takes us to exotic India and exposes us to forbidden Hindu rites dedicated to Shakti in her apocalyptic form of Kali, the World Destroyer. Also detailed is her husband, Shiva, whose followers vie with Kali's cultists to prevent the premature end of the world. Modern mages can involve themselves in this struggle and reap many magical secrets — but at what cost?

WARNING!

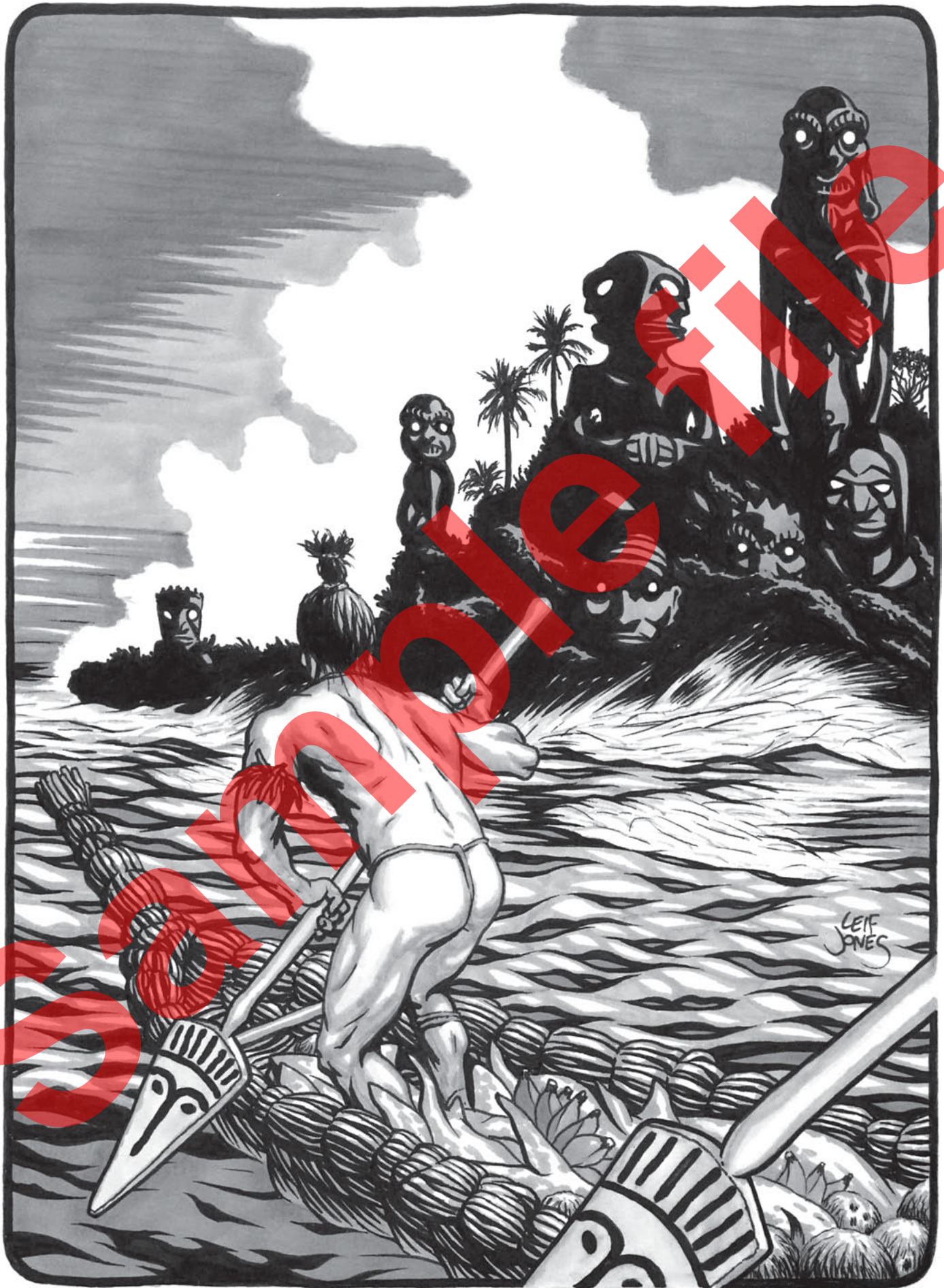
This book deals with some dark and nasty themes — things like Ragnarok, evil tikis dedicated to deep sea gods, an immortal liche, and Kali herself, the goddess of raw destruction. Oddly enough, there is no Black Dog Game Factory logo. That doesn't mean you shouldn't act mature when reading some of this material; we just figure that you know what to expect by now and don't need a logo to hold your hand and warn you away from the gritty stuff. Just to make it clear: this book is recommended for mature readers.

That said, we don't recommend you read this with salacious intent. These themes are explored in the context of the World of Darkness — a horror setting. They aren't here to provide splatterpunk thrills, but to honestly express the material covered — you can't talk about Kali without considering some disturbing images. Sure, this stuff can be spooky — that's part of the point — but it should also be fearsome. Don't lose track of the horror or shirk from the evil intent that some people display toward others. It's all part of playing a horror roleplaying game.

In the Shadows of the World Ash: The Norse delves into the ancient ways of runesinging and fate-weaving, still kept alive by a hidden few but usually taught only to those willing to relive the All-Father's sacrifice on the World Tree — a dangerous stunt not many mages could survive. The ways of the runes are harsh and unforgiving, but also powerful and brimming with wisdom from the wells of fate.

Singing by Moonlight: European Shamanism looks at the diverse practices of Celtic, Finnish, Germanic and Slavic peoples: the shamanic songs, spells and Wonders still remembered in epic and story, but rarely practiced by mages in this day and age. Some of these old ways still hold power and can be renewed by those willing to put in the hard years of study and fieldwork.

The Lost Empire: Etruria uncovers the supernatural secrets of the Etruscans, the civilization that birthed Rome but was later subsumed by it. *The Ides of Februius* prologue told the tale of the unearthing of an elder horror. This chapter reveals different perspectives on that event, along with rites, Wonders and creatures once associated with Etruscan magic.



SAD ISLANDS IN STRANGE SEAS. P⊕LYNESIA



It was raining in Seattle and the natives were happy. It had been a long, dry summer — thanks to global warming — and the city, used to being constantly washed clean, had begun to take on a nasty funk: The alleys reeked of stale piss and the whole arc of land around the Sound had developed a fishy odor.

Michael “Mutt” Eimut walked down Pike Street with his leather backpack full to bursting. He kept up a fast pace, his eyes scanning left and right for the Kon-Tiki restaurant, where he was supposed to have been 10 minutes ago. When he found it, his forehead crinkled a bit. The Kon-Tiki looked too forgotten to be real, too hokey to exist in the 21st century. The arcing outrigger beam poked up from the front of the A-frame structure and curved upwards. From its carved tip hung a cracked lamp that swung forlornly in the cold wind.

Mutt thought he might have seen places like this before — a lot of restaurants and hotels built in the early '60s tried to take on a patina of mystery. They put thatching over the shingles, added a few bamboo poles and gave everything an exotic Polynesian feel in order to pander South Pacific exoticism to Americans, for whom everything had been rendered banal by the thoroughly sterilized Eisenhower era.

There was no street number, but Kon-Tiki was clearly the place he was supposed to be. Mutt expected the dark, carved-wood door to be locked, but it opened smoothly.

Inside, Kon-Tiki was absolutely black. He considered the possibility that he might be walking into a Technocracy trap, and his stomach began to churn.

Mutt was preparing to call a moon spirit to provide some light when he heard a low, accented voice ask “What’s your name, boy?”

“Uh... Mutt,” replied the young mage.

“Good,” said the voice, “You’re the guy. I wasn’t sure. You’re early.”

“I’m late, actually.”

“You’re less late than anyone else has been. That makes you early.”

In the middle of the vast, open space, a bonfire roared to life in the center of a pool of placid water. In the firelight, Mutt noticed the profusion of grotesque, carved wooden idols staring at him from everywhere. Some were tall and free-standing, others perched on poles, looking down at him. Smaller ones rested on the dusty old chairs that hadn’t seen any use since Kon-Tiki closed down in 1973. He’d seen these carved idols before, and they’d always seemed silly, a remnant of particularly odd American taste. Now, however, in the firelight, there was something powerfully creepy about them.

A figure sitting in front of the flaming fountain rose and approached Mutt. The shadow offered its hand, and Mutt shook it, which seemed somehow odd or falsely intimate,